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AUTHOR Harste, Jerome C.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

A perspective for analyzing and interpreting data collected on reading teachers by the Educational Testing Service at the request of the Data Analysis Committee of the International Reading Association is presented in this manuscript. Increasingly, the teacher variable in reading instruction has become a topic of investigation. The author suggests a model of teacher as decisionmaker and attempts to relate dominant teacher beliefs and characteristics with their theoretical orientation toward reading instruction. An overview of variables such as race, sex, teaching experience, and training of reading teachers is provided. Trends in perception of decisionmaking involvement, beliefs, goals selected for the classroom reading program, and the relationship of goal selection to other teacher variables is discussed. Implications and directions for classroom teachers, administrators, teacher trainers, researchers, publishers, and state and federal agency personnel are outlined. (KS)

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THE TEACHER OF READING

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by
Jerome C. Harste
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Leo Fay
Indiana University

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This manuscript interprets one portion of the 1970-71 data collected by the Educational Testing Service under contract No. OEC-0-71-3715. Interpretation of this data was undertaken as a function of the 1975-76 Data Analysis Committee of the International Reading Association. No official endorsement of the Office of Education, the Educational Testing Service, nor the International Reading Association should be assumed. This manuscript was presented at the 1976 Annual Meeting of the International Reading Association, Anaheim, California, May 13, 1976.

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A Review of Related Research

Any explication of the essential components of an effective reading program will likely include a discussion of the teacher's role. Research findings have made it abundantly clear that the single most important element of an effective reading program is the regular classroom teacher. Many other factors are important, of course, but these research findings suggest pupil success or failure is most directly related to the "teacher variable" in the teaching of reading.

One of the best known research efforts related to the teaching of reading is the Cooperative Research Program in First Grade Reading Instruction, reported in detail in the Reading Research Quarterly (Bond and Dykstra, 1967). This research program involved twenty-seven individual studies carried on in various parts of the United States. The studies attempted to discover if there were an approach to initial reading instruction that would produce superior reading and spelling achievement at the end of grade one. Various instructional approaches, including the linguistic, basal, language experience, and i.t.a., were evaluated in terms of standardized measures of reading achievement.

Though Dykstra (1971) reported that there were problems in making sure that each approach was used in a pure form, the study's findings and conclusions were significant. In the first place the study pointed out that children seem to learn to read by a variety of materials and methods. The authors stated ". . . no one approach is so distinctively better in all situations and respects than the others that it should be considered the

one best method and the one to be used exclusively" (Bond and Dykstra, 1967). The message was clear: Improved reading achievement is not a function solely of approach or method. The authors continue:

> Future research might well center on teaching and learning situation characteristics . . . . The tremendous range among classrooms within any method points out the importance of elements in the learning situation over and above the methods employed. *To improve reading instruction, it is necessary to train better teachers of reading rather than to expect a panacea in the form of materials.* (p. 11)

Similar statements have been made by others. Ramsey (1962) in an evaluation of three grouping procedures for teaching reading, concluded, "The thing that the study probably illustrates most clearly is that the influence of the teacher is greater than that of a particular method, a certain variety of materials, or a specific plan of organization. *Given a good teacher, other factors in teaching reading tend to pale to insignificance.*"

Harris and Morrison (1969) reiterated this conclusion. These authors reported a three-year study of two approaches to teaching reading, basal reader vs. language experience. They found, as did Bond and Dykstra, that differences in mean reading scores *within* each method were much larger than differences between methods and approaches:

> The results of the study have indicated that the teacher is far more important than the method. Clearly procedures such as smaller classes and provision of auxiliary personnel may continue to give disappointing results if teaching skills

> are not improved. It is recommended, therefore, that in-service workshops and expert consultive help be provided for all teachers and especially for those with minimal experience (339).

These studies have helped to establish the importance of the teacher variable in the teaching of reading. They have, in fact, stimulated much subsequent research as the sections entitled, "Teacher Preparation and Practice" in the Annual Summaries of Investigations Relating to Reading (Weintraub, *et. al.*, 1973, 1974) attest. The teacher variable has been studied from a number of perspectives and always in the hope of finding and identifying the one variable which makes, or seems to make, the qualitative difference. Some examples of the dimensions of this variable most recently studied include the following: training (Roeder, Beal and Eller, 1973; Ahern and White, 1974; Garry, 1974), beliefs (Mates, 1974), felt needs (Rutherford and Weaver, 1974; Yarington and Kotler, 1973), problems encountered in teaching reading (Lichtman, 1973), as well as information processing differences among teachers (Long and Henderson, 1974).

In spite of the fact that the reading profession has been fairly certain about the importance of the teacher variable and its relationship to pupil achievement in reading for roughly the past decade - - its importance was suspected long before that - - very little insignt has been gained into the variable. After reviewing the research on the teacher variable, it is certainly possible to agree with Jackson (1966) who wrote:

> . . . Almost all of the noble crusades that have set out in search of the best teacher and the best method . . . have returned empty-handed. The few discoveries to date . . . are pitifully

> small in proportion to their cost in time and energy. For example, the few drops of knowledge that can be squeezed out of a half-century of research on the personality characteristics of good teachers are so low in intellectual food value that it is almost embarrassing to discuss them . . . (p. 9).

Part of the reason for this disappointment may be that the teacher variable, although well established as being important, has seldom been studied directly. In fact, if the research which establishes the importance of the teacher variable is closely examined (Bond and Dykstra, 1967; Ramsey, 1962; Harris and Morrison, 1969), one finds that none of these researchers were actually studying the teacher variable directly. Their identification of the variable apparently rests largely on their inability to find significance among and between the variables they were actually studying.

Recently Singer (1974) has suggested, from his analysis of low-achieving and high-achieving schools, that we modify the hypothesis that it's the teacher who makes the difference. "The more adequate hypothesis," he states, "is that to the degree that the faculty, including the principal, is trained, committed to, and implements any valid system of reading instruction now available, will there be a cumulative and significant difference in reading achievement." Although Singer doesn't title his hypothesis, we interpret him as recommending that *internal program thrust and consistency* be studied.

Another suggestion for modifying the hypothesis has been made by Harste and Burke (1975). They propose that the key component of the teacher variable is the teacher's *theoretical orientation*. They operationally define this component as a particular knowledge and belief system about

reading which strongly influence critical decision-making related to both the teaching and learning of reading. Interestingly, they propose that both teachers *and* learners hold particular and identifiable theoretical orientations about reading which in turn significantly effect expectancies, goals, behavior, and outcomes at all levels.

Although Singer (1974) does not propose that theoretical orientation is the key dimension of internal program thrust and consistency which he recommends be studied, Harste and Burke's findings (1975) suggest that such an exploration would be fruitful. In fact, if a school system had adopted a particular instructional program, had made sure it was being implemented appropriately, and had chosen criterion measures in accordance with the thrust of the program, Harste and Burke would argue that the variable of theoretical orientation was the key component of this thrust.

Because teachers' theoretical orientation appears to provide a potentially valuable perspective for gaining additional insight into the teacher variable in the teaching of reading, it will be utilized as one basis for the analysis, discussion and interpretation of the ETS data on which this chapter is based. The other major perspective utilized to examine the data will be that of viewing the teaching of reading as a decision-making process.

The Teacher of Reading as an Instructional Decision-Maker

This perspective is based upon a decision-making model of teaching. This model has been discussed elsewhere (Fay, Harste, Newman, 1973) but for ease of reference is presented below. This model of teacher behavior

as it relates to reading instruction suggests that the highly visible process of teaching, as observed in a classroom, represents the tryout and

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PLACE FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

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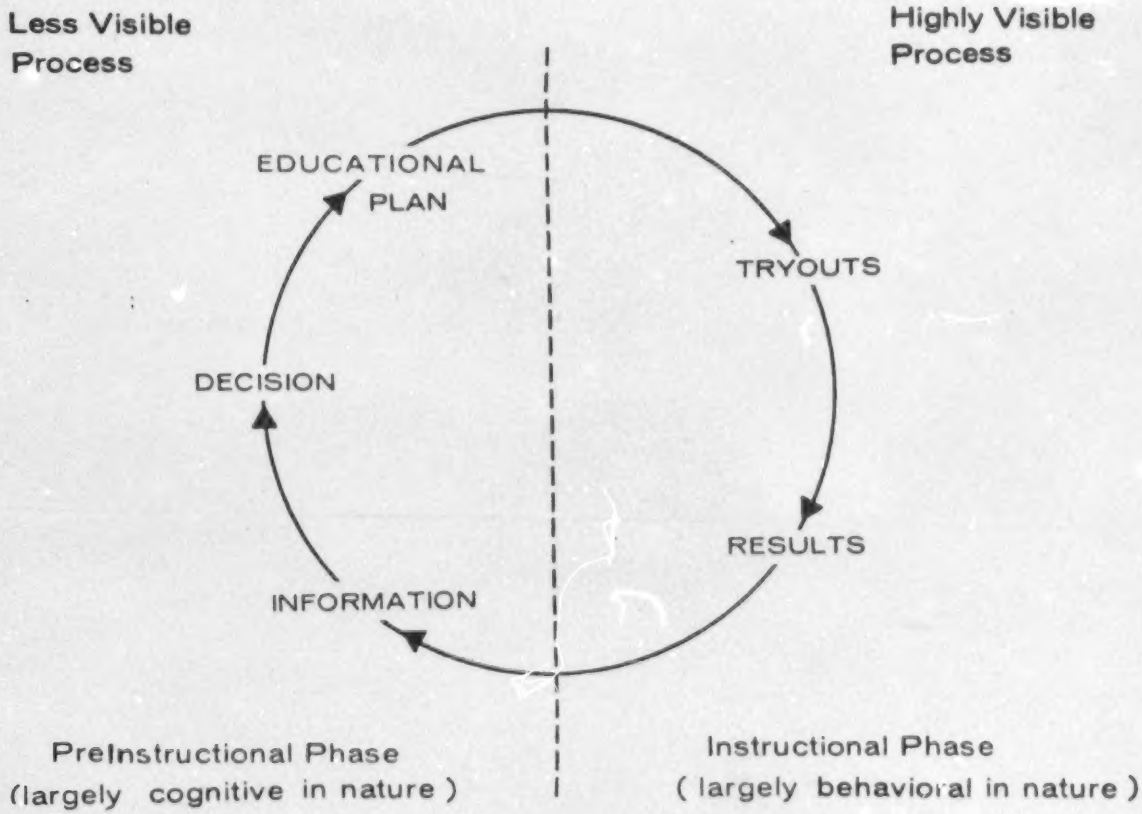
results of an instructional plan. This instructional plan results from a series of decisions regarding what objectives to set, what materials and procedures to use, how to organize students, how much time to allocate, and the like. This conceptualization divides teaching into two major phases: the *perinstructional* or planning phase (largely cognitive in nature), and an *instructional* or action phase (largely behavioral in nature).

Dividing the instructional act in this manner has several advantages. First, it accents the cognitive nature of teaching. While not all which happens during the preinstructional phase of teaching is cognitive (the actual writing out of a plan, for example, is behavioral), most is. The reverse is true during instruction. Nonetheless, even during instruction teachers must process much information and make many on-the-spot decisions. While the instructional phase is largely behavioral, cognitive processing, must also take place. Cognitive processing, which characterizes both the preinstructional and instructional phases of teaching, has not been the focus of much teacher education research conducted during the 60's and 70's. Most research during this period focused upon the behavioral dimensions of teaching (Flanders, 1960; Rosenshine, 1971, 1974). We perceive the aspect of our conceptualization which emphasizes the cognitive nature of teaching as one of its overriding strengths.

FIGURE I

TEACHING AS A DECISION MAKING PROCESS [1]



[1] A model adapted from Newman, Anabel P., Harste, Jerome C., and Stowe, Richard A. Project RELATE : A Set of Teacher Training materials in Reading and Language Arts. Field Services Department, Audio -Visual Center, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana 1972

A second advantage to this model is that it permits exploration of relationships which exist between planning instruction and carrying out instruction. Because of this feature, the model is diagnostic in nature. By studying teacher behavior at each level, decisions can be made as to where improvements might be made in teaching. For example, some teachers are able to cognitively process information appropriately, but are unable to carry out their well-conceived plans in the classroom. Other teachers have difficulty making appropriate decisions and developing a sound instructional plan. While both types of teachers have difficulties carrying out instruction, the problems they have are quite different. Therefore they will need different kinds of self-help or assistance to improve the effectiveness of their teaching.

Up to this point the cognitive processing dimension of teaching which results in decisions on the part of the teacher has only been introduced. The following definition should help to carify this dimension. Cognitive processing is operationally defined in terms of the teaching of reading as what the teacher "does" with information available (i.e., student oral reading ability, standardized test results, observational data collected on the student, student performance on workbook pages, etc.) to make an instructional decision (i.e., what objectives to set, what materials to use, what procedures to follow, and how to organize the reading program for a child).

At the preinstructional level insights into how a teacher cognitively processes information can be gleamed by studying (1) what goals are set for the classroom reading program, (2) what behaviors are perceived as reflective of "good" reading ability, (3) what proedures,

materials, and information is used for instructional diagnosis, (4) what weighting is given to particular diagnostic information, (5) what approach and materials will be selected and used in the prescriptive program, (6) what environment is perceived as most condusive to reading growth, and (7) what criteria will be used to determine achievement in reading. A comparable set of decision points are identifiable at the instructional phase of teaching for studying how teachers cognitively process information while they are providing instruction.

A Perspective for Analyzing and Interpreting the Data

Given a decision-making perspective of the role of a teacher of reading and coupling with it the current level of understanding about the teacher variable in the teaching of reading, a schema can be formulated for analyzing the data which have been collected on teachers in the ETS study. The research schema is graphically presented in Figure 2. While

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PLACE FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

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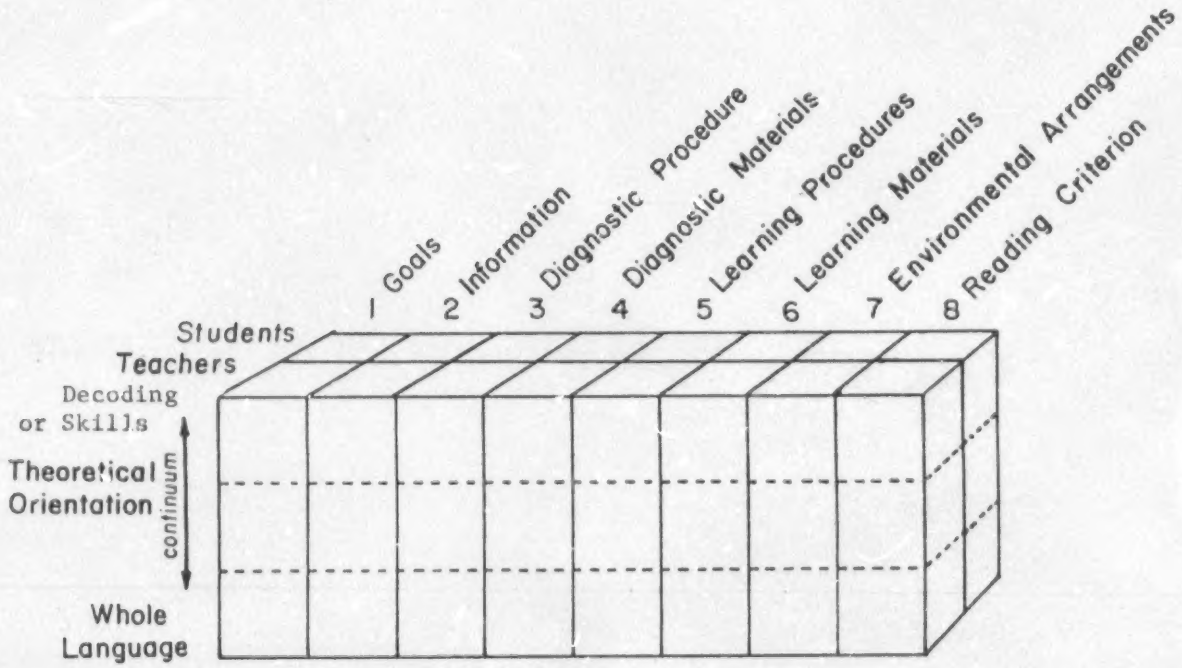
the data available does not make it possible to study all of the interrelationships suggested by the schema, it is possible to look at relationships such as belief patterns to goals selected along the teacher dimension. It is felt that an analysis of this sort should lead to the identification of the predominant theoretical orientation toward reading instruction held by today's teachers of reading. To this end, dominant teacher beliefs in relationship to the major goals teachers identified for their reading program will be studied.

A SCHEMA
FOR STUDYING READING TEACHER ON-SITE PLANNING BEHAVIOR



Information Processing

1. Goals Selected and Weighing of Goals
2. Information Selected for Diagnosis and the Weighing of such Information
3. Diagnostic Procedures To Be Used
4. Diagnostic Materials To Be Used
5. Learning Procedures To Be Used
6. Learning Materials To Be Used
7. Environmental Arrangements To Be Used
8. Reading Criterion To Be Used

For purposes of interpretation, two major orientations will be identified; namely a decoding or skills orientation and, for lack of a better term, a "whole-language" orientation. While teachers' theoretical orientations to reading most likely falls along a continuum, these descriptiors have been employed to characterize fairly easily identifiable polar positions. The first grouping of beliefs is representative of a *decoding or skills* orientation toward reading instruction. This orientation views reading as an offshoot of language, the accomplishment of which is dependent chiefly upon developing and manipulating the relationship between the sounds of language and their graphic representations. The second major orientation views reading as one of four functions in the total language process. It assumes not only that the receptive and expressive systems of language are shared, but that they are interdependent and interactive aspects of a process. This process has as its primary focus comprehension. This perspective will be referred to as a *whole-language* orientation. While little precision can be gained because the ETS data is pooled, it was felt that this analysis could result in the identification of the current and major theoretical orientation held by teachers of reading in the United States today.

Because the purpose of this chapter is to provide a status report on today's teacher of reading in addition to offerring an interpretation of the ETS data, the chapter is organized to serve both functions. The next section will, while concentrating on the status function, describe today's teacher of reading in terms of key factors which may be related to teacher goal selection patterns; namely, sex, teaching experience, training, involvement in decision-making and beliefs. The third major

section of this chapter will concentrate on the relationship of these variables to the reading goals selected by the majority of the teachers. A fourth and final section will summarize the analysis for the purposes of identifying major needs and making recommendations.

TODAY'S TEACHER OF READING -- AN OVERVIEW

An analysis of the data collected by ETS suggests that today's teacher of reading might typically be described as a white female with six or more years of teaching experience holding not only a regular certification, but reporting some training in the diagnosis and treatment of reading problems, and who reportedly believes, among other things, that (1) methods are more important than either method or material in the teaching of reading, (2) the teacher's ability is more important than either method or material in the teaching of reading, and (3) in teaching reading a wrong response can be as useful as a correct response. With this overview, we will examine the basis of this overall picture of today's teacher of reading.

Race

The finding that the majority of today's teachers of reading are white Caucasians is hardly surprising given the fact that any random sample of teachers would produce a similar result. However, teachers of reading reported at all grade levels (2nd, 4th, 6th) that most of their students were of the same racial or national origin as they were. This finding suggests that in areas when there is a concentration of minority group

pupils, there is also a concentration of minority group reading teachers. While this correspondence isn't perfect, 80 times out of 100 this general trend prevails.

The trend itself is, of course, biased by the fact that the majority of the population of the United States is white. In fact, given a high concentration of pupils of one racial or national origin (76-100%), the probability of finding a white teacher in the classroom, if the students are also white, is 95 times out of 100. For Blacks, given the same concentration, the probability of finding a Black teacher is 48 times out of 100. For Spanish surnamed children, the probability is 17 times out of 100. For American Indian, Oriental, and other children of other racial or national origins, the probability of finding a high concentration of these minority pupils in one area is so low that no comparable statistics are available.

Sex

The greatest majority of elementary school teachers in the United States are female. As would be expected, the lower the grade level the more probable the teacher's sex will be female. If indeed Patricia Sexton (1967) was justified in her contention that elementary school children are being "skirted to death" because of sustained contact with only female teachers throughout their childhood, these data support her contention. In recent years the number of male elementary school teachers has increased, particularly in the upper elementary school grades. But even in the upper elementary school grades, the probability of having a female teacher is almost twice as high as having a male teacher.

The data presented in Table 1, below, illustrate the percentage of male and female teachers of reading at the 2nd, 4th and 6th grade levels.

TABLE 1

TEACHER SEX BY GRADE LEVEL

Question: What is your sex?

Sex \ Grade Level	2nd (N=600)	4th (N=560)	6th (N=424)
Male	0.5	10.2	35.4
Female	99.5	89.8	64.6

Experience

Table 2 indicates that approximately 20 percent of today's teachers of reading have at least one, but less than three years teaching experience; another 20 percent have three, but less than 6 years of experience; leaving approximately 60 percent who have had six or more years of teaching experience. At first glance these data may seem somewhat surprising.

PLACE TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Upon reflection, however, the results seem logical, and probably reflect the realities of the job market. In general, teachers appear to be holding onto their jobs longer; resulting in a reduction in the number of people entering the profession, accompanied by more stability within the profession.

TABLE 2

YEARS OF TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Question: How many years of teaching experience (public and nonpublic), including this school year, have you had?

Grade Level / Years of Teaching Experience	2nd (N=601)	4th (N=560)	6th (N=425)
One Year or less	8.8	8.2	9.4
More than 1 year but less than 3 years	9.3	10.7	14.4
At least 3 years but less than 6 years	19.0	20.2	18.6
At least 6 years but less than 10 years	13.1	17.0	17.2
At least 10 years but less than 20 years	28.3	25.4	23.1
Twenty years or more	21.5	18.6	17.4

Declining birth rates have undoubtedly also contributed to the reduction in the number of persons entering the teaching profession.

Table 3 reports the results of having asked respondents, "How many years, including this year, have you taught in this school?" These data again show a remarkable amount of stability, indicating that from 40-60% of the teachers have at least three years of residence in their current schools. Comparison of the data in Tables 2 and 3 indicates that 18% of the teachers at Grade 2; 22% of the teachers at Grade 4; and 21%

PLACE TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

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of the teachers at Grade 6 have recently transferred into, or begun their teaching career in, their current position. Conversely, these data suggest that from 78 to 82% of the faculty were stable. Clearly this is a large enough percentage of teachers to facilitate continuity and consistency in the reading program. However, the fact that 78-82% of the teachers remained at the same school obviously does not guarantee such continuity and consistency. Further, it should be recalled that these data represent teachers of reading as a total group. Again it should be obvious that teacher turnover is very high in some schools, and very low in others.

Because of the positive relationship between years of experience and effective teaching, the data presented in Table 3 indicate -- at least the potential for -- program strength as a result of relatively low turnover among teachers of reading. Whether or not consistency and continuity in reading programs actually occurs as a result of low teacher turnover is obviously not directly discernable from the data.

TABLE 3

YEARS OF TEACHING EXPERIENCE IN THIS SCHOOL

Question: How many years, including this school year, have you taught in this school?

Grade Level / Years in this school	2nd (N=601)	4th (N=560)	6th (N=425)
One Year or less	18.0	18.6	24.2
More than 1 year but less than 3 years	18.3	22.0	20.5
At least 3 years but less than 6 years	27.6	26.2	25.6
At least 6 years but less than 10 years	13.5	16.8	14.1
At least 10 years but less than 20 years	18.5	13.6	12.9
Twenty years or more	4.2	2.9	2.6

Training

For those whose goal it was to have a "bachelor's degree in every classroom," 1970-71 must be recorded as the academic year in which their dream became a reality. Roughly 97.5 percent of all teachers reported that they held a bachelor's degree when asked, "What is the highest earned college degree you hold?" Twenty percent of this group reported that they had also earned a master's degree. While this trend is viewed as a positive sign of academic advancement, only a few more than half of the respondents reported they had special training in the diagnosis and treatment of reading problems at either the preservice, inservice, or graduate level.

In order to interpret these findings it is necessary to know what training in reading is typically provided at the baccalaureate level. Recently Roeder, Beal, and Eller (1973) conducted an investigation which attempted to answer this question. They found that 80 percent of the 4-year colleges and universities that responded to the survey reported that they required only one course in the teaching of reading for preservice teachers. Of these, 16.6 percent combined reading with another methods course. Approximately 3 percent of the colleges and universities surveyed reported that they required additional courses in reading beyond the basic course. Given both this information and the fact that most teachers have earned a baccalaureate degree, it can be concluded that, while teachers of reading have received some specialized training, that training is minimal.

In the brochure, Professional Preparation in Reading for Classroom Teachers: Minimum Standards, the Professional Standards and Ethics Committee of the International Reading Association recommends the following academic training for elementary school teachers:

> A minimum of six semester hours, or the equivalent, in an accredited reading course or courses.
>
> One or more courses for elementary teachers covering each of the following areas:
>
> General Background
> The nature of language
> Psychology of the reading process
> Interrelationship of activities and outcomes in the four language arts
> Nature and scope of the reading program
>
> Reading Skills and Abilities
> Prereading readiness abilities
> Readiness for reading at any level
> Word recognition skills (including word analysis)
> Vocabulary development
> Reading comprehension abilities, including critical reading
> Interpretive oral reading
>
> Diagnosis and Remedial Teaching
> Techniques for evaluation of progress
> Difficulties frequently experienced by children in learning to read
> Diagnostic techniques that can be used by the classroom teacher
> Differentiation of instruction to fit individual capabilities
> Corrective methods for use in the classroom
>
> Organization of the Reading Program
> Classroom organization for reading
> Varied approaches to reading instruction
> Planning a reading lesson
>
> Materials
> Knowledge and use of basic and supplementary materials of instruction
> Selection of suitable reading materials
> Knowledge of children's literature
>
> Application of Reading Skills
> Skills needed for reading in content fields
> Qualities to be appreciated in literature
> Fostering lifetime use of reading

Given this delineation of minimum standards, it is reasonable to conclude on the basis of the ETS data that today's teachers of reading have not met these standards for training.

Involvement in Decision-Making

Teachers were asked, "Compared with other elementary schools in your district or community, how satisfied are you with respect to the following things: physical facilities, faculty, ability of the student body, attitudes of student body, administration, and the overall philosophy of education?" Their responses on the average ranged from moderately satisfied (physical facilities, ability of student body, attitude of student body, and overal philosphy) to highly satisfied (faculty). They were ambiguous in their satisfaction with administrators. This apparent ambiguity can be explained in part by other data collected in the study. These data suggest teachers often do not take part in key decisions which effect them. For example, 51-56% of the teachers at various grade levels reported they were assigned to teach in the school where they were presently teaching; 64-67% reported they were assigned to teach the class they were currently instructing; 52% of the teachers perceived the administration to be moderately or not at all responsive to the idea of seeking remedial help for their students; and 58-61% felt the administration was at best moderately responsive to changes in the curriculum.

Clearly these are decisions in which teachers should be involved if they are to assume a significant role in curricular decision-making.

While these data suggest that typically 40-48% of the teachers had their decisions supported by the administration, 52-60% reportedly did not. Although there may be a trend to give teachers increasing responsibility for curricular decisions, these data suggest there is considerable room for progress in this regard. It is our belief that the professionalism of classroom teachers is undermined when they do not have a significant role in decision-making which directly effects instruction.

Beliefs

An analysis of teacher response patterns to a series of general questions about the teaching of reading clearly indicate teachers almost universally accept the notion that the teacher variable is the most important variable in the teaching of reading. Using the criterion of 70 percent of the teachers in agreement, teachers overwhelmingly agreed with the following statements:

(1) Methods are more important than materials in the teaching of reading.

(2) The teacher's ability is more important than either method or materials in the teaching of reading.

(3) In teaching reading a wrong response can be as useful as a correct response.

These results suggest a rather definite pattern of beliefs about the teaching of reading in general. The universal acceptance of the importance of the teacher variable in the teaching of reading clearly speaks to the urgent need for better understanding of this variable.

Further data regarding the teacher's belief system was collected by asking them about beliefs regarding the teaching of reading to disadvantaged

children. The following statements were chosen by 70% or more of teachers at each grade level:

(1) Disadvantaged children have more trouble learning to read than advantaged children.

(2) Disadvantaged children have different linguistic experiences than advantaged children.

(3) Disadvantaged children are disadvantaged mainly in that they do not have the foundation of concepts that advantaged children have.

(4) Learning to verbalize thoughts is particularly important for disadvantaged children.

(5) These children do not want to learn.

(6) The pupils want to learn, but do not have the right background for school work.

(7) Improving the student's self-image as a learner is particularly important for disadvantaged children.

Taken in their entirety, agreement with these statements suggests that today's teacher of reading is aware of both the linguistic and cognitive dimensions of the reading process. Collectively these responses suggest a fundamental belief about reading: The more the language and the thought patterns of the reader reflect those of the author, the more likely it is that the pupil will experience success in reading. In general, teachers agree with the statement that disadvantaged children have difficulty learning to read. They also agree with other statements which suggest that pupils have this difficulty because they do not have an appropriate background for the school experience. Their agreement with

other statements suggests that teachers perceive this difference in background to be the result of differences in language, thought, and motivation. It is possible that these concerns are the result of an overemphasis in the teaching of reading on *language production* rather than *language competency*. The distinction here is an important one, for as Goodman (1973) has shown, disadvantaged children often can understand Standard English (he refers to this as "receptive control"), but yet not necessarily be able to speak or pronounce words in this dialect (language production). The concerns expressed by teachers through their selection of beliefs suggest that they may be over-emphasizing the production of "Standard English." In the case of reading orally, for example, this may mean that teachers who hold these beliefs insist that a child produce exactly what the printed page "says", regardless of whether what the child says means the same thing or not. In contrast, teachers stressing language competency rather than language production would be more concerned with whether or not the child got the author's message or comprehended what was read and would deemphasize many phonological, morphological and syntaxical descreptancies which existed between the response given and the response expected when the child read. An emphasis on language production, as opposed to language competency, in short, does explain the series of beliefs which were selected by the majority of today's teachers of reading. If this is truely the dominant emphasis of reading programs in the United States, this fact should be confirmed by teachers' choice of goals for the classroom reading program.

TODAY'S TEACHER OF READING - A CLOSER VIEW

It is the intent of this section to explore those factors which appear to be related to the overall pattern of goals selected by teachers of reading for their classroom reading program. For this purpose each major factor - sex, teaching experience, involvement in decision-making, training, and beliefs - will be examined in relationship to the goals selected.

Goals Selected for the Classroom Reading Program

Teachers were asked two questions: "How would you rate each of the following activities in terms of importance to you as goals in your current teaching of reading?" and "How much time does a typical pupil in your reading class spend in each of the following types of activities?" The intersect of teacher's responses to these two questions was used to indicate the major goals selected. A goal was considered to be of major importance if it was identified by at least 70 percent of the teachers as being of primary importance in their program. A criterion of 50 percent or more of the teachers was established to identify those activities which students spent a significant amount of time on during their reading instructional period. Using the above criteria the following goals were identified as being most important:

(1) Developing sight vocabulary (whole word recognition)

(2) Learning word meanings (vocabulary)

(3) Phonic and/or structural analysis

(4) Reading silently (independent silent reading).

Taken as a whole, this list of major goals suggests that most classroom teachers of reading view reading as a precise process. This view of reading often implies that the most appropriate criteria to judge a student's reading ability would be the accuracy with which s/he was able to pronounce words. Primary importance is placed on word recognition and word analysis strategies involving the scrutiny of letters, letter patterns, and words. Teachers' choice of the goal "silent reading" may be indicative of a perception that the act of silent reading serves as a means of practice and reinforcement of the other goals which were selected. If this interpretation is accurate, it suggests that the majority of today's teachers of reading have a decoding or skills orientation to reading. Primary importance is placed on the word analysis skills and vocabulary development in the belief that reading is largely a decoding and word recognition process. Teachers holding this orientation typically believe that with recognition of individual words will come comprehension of a sentence, paragraph, or longer section of text.

While the above explanation seems the most reasonable given the patterns of goals selected by teachers, it might also be argued that the goals selected refect a whole-language orientation to reading. If the goals selected by teachers did indeed reflect a whole-language orientation toward reading, it is likely that the goal of reading silently would have received a higher priority than whole word recognition, vocabulary development, and phonetic and structural analysis. And, while these latter goals would still be expected to receive a high priority, it could be expected that less instructional time would be spent on them than on reading silently. This interpretation is based on the expectation that teachers

holding a whole-language orientation toward reading believe that the emphasis in teaching reading must be centered on the fact that reading is first and foremost a meaning-getting process. Word analysis skills and vocabulary development, while not unimportant, are presented by teachers holding this orientation in such a way so that they are subordinate to reading as a meaning-getting process. If a teacher's view of reading were inclined toward the whole-language perspective, it would follow that the goals of "Reading Silently," "Being read to," "Reading for Enjoyment," "Enriching Cultural Background," and/or "Creative Writing," would have received a higher priority rating than was evident in the ETS data. Since these latter goals were not selected as being most important, it appears that the majority of today's teachers of reading hold a decoding or skills orientation to the teaching of reading. It will be the purpose of the next section to explore what variables - sex, teaching experience, training, involvement in decision-making and/or beliefs - seem related to the major goals selected by classroom teachers for their reading program.

Goals Selected in Relationship to Overview Teacher Variables

In order to study the relationship between the goals selected by classroom teachers for their reading program, a series of statistical comparisions (t tests) were made between each goal selected and each of the status variables identified earlier - sex, teaching experience, training, involvement in decision-making, and beleifs.

An analysis of these data suggest that statistically significant ($p \leq .05$) relationships exist between several of these variables and the classroom teachers' choice of reading goals. These variables are listed below in the order of their strength of relationship to the major goals selected:

(1) Beliefs About Reading

(2) Beliefs About Disadvantaged Pupils

(3) Teaching Experience

(4) Training.

One conclusion which could be drawn from these data is that teacher beliefs, taken collectively, are a major variable in understanding today's teacher of reading and reading instruction as it is generally conducted in the United States. The data appear to support the notion that teacher's theoretical orientation is a variable worthy of continued exploration by the reading profession.

In order to further discuss and interpret these data, it is necessary to recall from previous analyses that teacher beliefs about disadvantaged children and the major goals they select for their classroom reading program generally reflect a theoretical orientation that has been termed a decoding or skills orientation to reading. Given this perspective, it can be said that "teaching experience" showed a significant relationship with three of the four major goals identified by teachers as those children spent the most time on during reading instruction. Further these data show that the longer the teacher has been teaching, the greater the likelihood that s/he will select as major goals those which are associated with a decoding, or skills orientation. Similarly, "training" shows a significant

relationship with the classroom teacher's choice of these goals as primary ones for her classroom reading program. Specifically these data show that with training in the diagnosis and treatment of reading problems, the likelihood of the teacher selecting decoding or skills oriented goals for her classroom reading program increases significantly.

It appears, then, that with increased experience and with increased training, the likelihood of a teacher developing a decoding or skills orientation to reading instruction increases. Further analysis of these variables across all possible goal categories indicates that experience has the effect of increasing the teacher's ability to operationalize this decoding orienation; that is, with experience teachers seem to devote more instructional time working toward the mastery of these goals and, consequently, they become more effective in promoting these goals. Training, on the other hand, does not appear to insure that the teacher will have children spend more of their instructional time on decoding or skill oriented goals, but only that s/he believes them to be most important. In this regard, the data show that with increased training in diagnosis, teacher selection of goal choices is much expanded. In terms of what goals children spent most of their time on in the classroom, training shows a significant relationship to "Phonic and/or Structural Analysis" and "Developing Visual Discrimination." Taken collectively, these choices suggest that, in general, "training" does much to further reinforce a decoding or skills orientation to reading. At the same time, the data also indicates that "training" results in teachers being able to deal with and/or accept other orientation to reading; at least at a cognitive awareness level.

"Sex" of the teacher showed a significant relationship to only one of the major goals; namely, "Developing sight vocabulary." "Involvement in Decision-Making" showed no realationship to any of the major reading goals selected by teachers. Because both "Sex" and "Involvement in Decion-Making" showed no relationship to any of the other goals listed, these variable appear to be less worthy of study than are the variables of beliefs, training, and experience.

While there may be several explanation for the saliency of the variables of beliefs, training, and experience, we hypothesize that they are interrelated at both a theoretical and practical level. Earlier we have stated that the major beliefs held by classroom teachers appear to reflect a decoding, or skills orientation to reading. To a certain extent, the concept of diagnostic-prescriptive teaching as it is frequently operationalized reflects this orientation. In general, "diagnosis" has been interpreted by the profession largely as an effort to find out what specific skills a child has failed to master. The assumption is that once these skills are identified, teaching them will move the child ahead. Permeating this notion is the belief that reading is a hierarchical skills process. If one accepts a skills hierarchy model of reading, it is logical to assume mastery of lower order skills is necessary for mastery of higher order skills. To the extent that courses in the diagnosis and teatment of reading problems reflect this model, the notion that reading is a decoding or skills process is perpetuated. The reader should note, however, that diagnostic instruction and a skills orientation to reading are not necessarily synonymous. Rather, the general prevailing trend, is one that makes them appear to be

synonymous. This is understandable, given the fact that the bulk of diagnostic reading tests, as well as the workbooks and "drill" material used reading programs, support and perpetuate a decoding or skills orientation to reading instruction.

Similarly, the fact that experience and a decoding orientation to reading are related is understandable if one accepts the fact that the longer the teacher holds her position, the greater the possibility she will develop a decoding and/or skills orienation to reading. This is plausible for a number of reasons. First, the longer she teaches the greater the teacher's exposure to published reading materials. Since most published materials reflect a skills or decoding approach to reading instruction, the greater the exposure to this orientation increases the possibility of adoption by the teacher. Second, to the extent that a skills orientation to reading is perpetuated by the recent emphasis on accountability (in that it makes this concept manageable), forces external to the school's reading program will influence teachers to hold this orientation. This is especially true of most state curriculum guides in reading, as well as most special program for which funding is available from the federal government. Their emphasis on accountability, we believe, encourages a simplistic skills definition of reading.

While there are obviously other explanation and interrelationships between these variables and their support of a decoding or skills orientation to reading, the point remains that these explanations are really conjecture and ought to be viewed as hypotheses in need of further study by the profession. The conclusion that classroom teachers hold a dominant decoding

or skills orientation toward the teaching of reading, and that this view is being supported by both experience and training, holds several implications for the profession in terms of what ought to be done. This is the subject of the final section.

TOMORROW'S TEACHER OF READING - IMPLICATIONS AND DIRECTIONS

The data and interpretations presented in this chapter provide extensive implications for the profession, which should receive thorough consideration.

For Classroom Teachers

This research, like other research before it, continues to accent the importance of the teacher variable in the teaching of reading. Unlike previous writings, this chapter identifies a dimension of this variable which appears highly related to reading instruction, namely, the teacher's theoretical orientation. The data analyzed in this chapter suggest that the predominant theoretical orientation toward reading held by today's teachers of reading is a decoding or skills orientation. To the extent that a decoding or skills orientation to reading violates what the profession has learned about language, how language operates, and its implication for the teaching of reading, we have every reason to be concerned. If reading is indeed a less precise process than it was once believed to be, and as Smith (1971, 1974), Goodman (1967, 1973), Burke (1972), Pearson (1975) and a growing number of other researchers

maintain, then the dominance of a decoding or skills orientation toward reading may be a contributing factor to the so-called "reading problem" in the United States.

Clearly, teachers need to become informed of alternative orientations to the teaching of reading. Teacher trainers and the professional associations should be concerned about the limited view of reading held by most teachers and should provide opportunities for training, research and discussion about other alternative perspectives. Inservice teachers need to read widely, request inservice programs, and be receptive to alternative views of reading. In the final analysis, teaching reading must rest upon a theoretical orientation. While many teachers may understandably react by saying, "I push no particular approach to reading," the fact remains that while this may be denied, teacher behavior in terms of the goals they accent reflect a particular orientation to reading. Theory cannot be divorced from practice. It behoves every teacher to become informed in order to conscientiously choose approaches to reading, and in order to make intelligent instructional decisions. The teaching of reading requires an understanding of the theoretical aspects of reading which then becomes the basis for practical considerations.

For Administrators

If, as has been suggested, the decoding or skills orientation to reading is so well entrenched (held by more than 70% of today's classroom teachers of reading) and is being supported by educational publishers, state departments of public instruction, the federal government with its

emphasis on accountability, and advanced training in reading, then we must be concerned with the question of how we can encourage the utilization of approaches to reading reflecting other theoretical orienations. This, needless to say, will not be an easy task. Given the ever-growing stability of the profession, and the fact that stability comes in the form of experience, a new focus on inservice education seems crucial. The earlier method of inviting a reading expert in for a speech or "one shot" stand will continue to prove inadequate. Well planned, well-coordinated, and prolonged inservice programs are necessary. Such a program should have as its first priority familiarizing regular classroom teachers with alternative models for teaching reading. Once this foundation has been established, inservice workshops designed to help teachers develop support materials for these alternate approaches would appear necessary given the fact that most of the materials currently on the market will not be supportive of other than a skills orientation.

It is recommended that administrators and those in charge of establishing and maintaining school reading programs seriously question the accountability movement in reading as it is currently interpreted. Clearly, administrators must make this and other efforts to establish an environment which is supportive of the adoption and implementation of reading programs based on alternative orientations to reading.

For Teacher Trainers

We would be indeed remiss if we did not make a special effort to point out the implications of this data for teacher training and for others

involved in the preparation of classroom teachers. First, alternate theoretical orientations to reading must be presented in such a form so that preservice and inservice teachers can not only understand but also apply these orientations in the classroom. Methods classes must be much more than a smorgasbord of techniques. Theory must be presented so that teachers can knowledgeably make instructional decisions throughout their professional life. The data presented in this chapter suggest that with advanced training teachers can cognitively deal with and/or accent goals reflecting alternative views of the reading process. Yet, the fact remains that these same teachers were apparently unable to operationalize these beliefs in their classrooms. A supervised field practicum correlated to all coursework--including advanced work--is suggested. Given the nature of the world in which teachers live, it is suggested that the focus of advanced work be on alternative orientations--other than only a decoding or skills orientation--to the teaching of reading. The assumption being that the current environment will do enough to support the decoding or skills orientation to reading instruction.

Given the fact that only one third of this national sample met the minimum standards of preparation for classroom teachers of reading, a direct and concerted effort should be made to add additional work in reading to the teacher certification requirements of the state. As recently as 1972, only 3 per cent of the institutions preparing classroom teachers met this requirement. One interpretation of this finding is that professors of reading have failed to provide the leadership necessary at the state level to get this situation changed. It is our recommendation that every effort be taken immediately to get certification patterns in line with IRA

minimum standards. It should be remembered that even these are minimal and, so some contend, even inadequate (Johnson, 1972; Mavrogenes, 1975).

Teacher trainers involved in the preparation of teachers for populations least well served by our schools have even a bigger task ahead of them. The data presented here suggest that teacher beliefs about disadvantaged children are of questionable validity. If one assumes that roughly 85 per cent of the children learn how to read, probably in spite of the methods we use--and that this trend prevails (Farr, Tuinman, Rowls, 1974) despite our recent efforts--then the current clamor in reading is an effort to help the other 15 per cent of our population learn how to read. This data suggest that one explanation of why we haven't been more successful is because we have continued to promote a decoding approach to reading. Special reading programs are rarely special. What we have tended to do is simply repackage the same approach, deceiving ourselves into thinking that we were doing something different. The child coming into these program has already failed using a skill approach. Rather than provide him with truly alternative approaches to reading--despite their labels--we have given him more of the same. Teachers working with children who are disabled readers must be especially well trained. For these teachers, training that goes beyond the minimum standards is advised.

For Researchers

The data presented here, in many respects, pose more questions than are answered. The data suggest that the dimension of theoretical orientation within the teacher variable merits much exploration. Following are several questions which might be addressed by future research:

1) What is the alignment of various beliefs to various theoretical orientations?
2) What information-processing variables best lend themselves to the exploration of theoretical orientation?
3) What are the relationships between teacher behavior during the preinstructional and the instructional phases?
4) How does teacher behavior differ by theoretical orientation at each of these levels?
5) What factors facilitate and/or inhibit teachers from implementing their beliefs in the classroom?
6) What is the relationship between various measures of pupil outcomes and theoretical orientation?
7) What effect do congruent and discrepant theoretical orientations, on the part of students and teachers, have on learning?
8) What effect do congruent and discrepant theoretical orientations, on the part of students and teachers, have on instruction?
9) If only one major orientation is refected in reading materials - despite their names - what implication does this have for conclusions reached by other researchers, i.e., Bond and Dykstra, Chall, etc.?

For Publishers

We feel compelled to strongly recommend that the educational publishers review their policy of supporting a particular model of reading. Given the fact that 70% or more of today's classroom teachers hold a decoding or skills orientation to reading, and are probably prone to

order materials reflecting this orientation, the publishers insistence on publishing such materials, from an economic viewpoint seems justifiable. We personally hold little hope for changing the publishing industry. Publishers will publish other types of materials, we believe, when teachers show through their materials orders that they want them.

For State and Federal Agency Personnel

Every effort should be made, we believe, to insure immediate implementation of IRA minimum standards of teacher preparation in reading. This is clearly a first priority order of business.

Policies which in effect emphasize a decoding or skills orientation to reading should be immediately reviewed and adjusted. The programs designed to help children least well served, when tied to the notion of strict accountability, may lead school personnel to operationalize inappropriate programs for these children. This is not to discourage accountability, for the problem is not here. Rather, the problem lies with the criteria upon which reading achievement is based. We recommend that criteria be more reading-like rather than based upon the mastery of skills which recent research suggests may or may not be related to reading.

Support for schools in their efforts to implement inservice programs of a much more extensive nature than has been customary seems necessary. Similarly, monies to stimulate further research of the theoretical orientation dimension of the teacher variable ought to be encouraged.

For Everyone

There have been two findings in reading research which we have always found somewhat obscure: 1) the notion that socioeconomic status is related to reading and 2) the supremacy of the teacher variable in teaching reading. Both of these findings, while important, have caused some frustration because one never knows quite what to do with them. The data and interpretations provided in this chapter have attempted to establish one dimension of the teacher variable worthy of pursuit by the profession. This should be encouraging. While the task is immense, having some direction should make the trip not only smoother but, more importantly, profitable.

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